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The Vancouver Art Gallery Receives its Most Significant Donation of International Contemporary Art in the Gallery's History

Brigitte and Henning Freybe promise a major gift of 122 artworks valued at over \$10M



January 17, 2025, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is thrilled to announce a promised gift of 122 artworks from Vancouver-based collectors **Brigitte and Henning Freybe**. The Freybes began collecting art in the 1970s and have built a unique and diverse collection, spanning painting, printmaking, sculpture, film, photography and installation. The gift to the Vancouver Art Gallery encompasses works by some of the most important European and North American artists working in the last 50 years—many rarely shown in Vancouver—including **Carl Andre, Nairy Baghramian, Christian Boltanski, Daniel Buren, Tacita Dean, Frank Stella, Alicja Kwade, Wolfgang Tillmans, Robert Rauschenberg, Julie Mehretu** and **William Kentridge**. The Freybes' collection also celebrates Vancouver, where they call home, through the support of many artists based in BC whose works will be gifted, including **Beau Dick, Stan Douglas, Geoffrey Farmer, Rodney Graham, Brian Jungen, Kathy Slade** and **Jeff Wall**.

“We are honoured to accept this transformative gift from the Freybes, one that was cultivated with support from **Daina Augaitis**, Chief Curator Emerita at the Vancouver Art Gallery, alongside other museum curators and directors over many years,” says **Anthony Kiendl**, CEO & Executive Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery. “The Freybe collection is diverse and wide-ranging—materially, geographically and conceptually—and at its core, it honours the creativity and knowledge that artists produce. This acquisition will reshape the Gallery's holdings of local and international art and add significant works by major figures from the contemporary art world.”

To celebrate this remarkable gift, and to honour the Freybes' contributions as patrons of the arts, collectors and longtime supporters of the Gallery, the Vancouver Art Gallery will organize *Postcards from the Heart: Selections from the Brigitte and Henning Freybe Collection*, a major showcase of their collection. Featuring more than 30 of the Freybe's most significant works, *Postcards from the Heart* will be the largest exhibition dedicated to the Freybe collection presented at a public museum, bringing together paintings, sculptures, photographs, films and works on paper from the 1960s to today.

"*Postcards from the Heart* represents the joy we have felt in meeting artists and experiencing and collecting art over the years. This is an extraordinarily special moment for us to not only see our collection together, but to share these significant and visionary artistic voices with Vancouver audiences and beyond," say **Brigitte and Henning Freybe**. "We are deeply invested in the Vancouver Art Gallery and its offering to the city. Gifting our collection to the Gallery and investing in its future is our way of giving back to this important community. It is a gesture of love to the art world."

The title of the exhibition is inspired by the dozens of letters and postcards sent to the Freybes from artists whose work they have collected and who they have hosted in their home over the past five decades. These treasured notes are a testament to the importance of art in their lives.

"The Freybes are not merely collectors of modern and contemporary works; they have dedicated their lives to art," says **Eva Respini**, Deputy Director & Director of Curatorial Programs. "Their story is one of passion, expression and an unwavering commitment to the transformative power of learning from, and living with, art."

Respini continues: "The first time I visited Brigitte and Henning, I felt an immediate kinship. They are utterly dedicated to artists and their vision, collecting works that most individuals would shy away from—either because they are too complicated to live with or the content is challenging. Over decades, through passion and patience, they have honed their eye and created one of the most important collections of contemporary art in Canada. It is an honour to bring this expansive collection into the public trust for Vancouverites to enjoy and learn from for generations to come."

Highlights of the exhibition include a sculptural wall-based work by American artist Robert Rauschenberg. Titled *Sea Cow Treaty (Spread)* (1977), Rauschenberg's assemblage also encompasses a working water feature with twinned taps that emit red and blue water into conjoined buckets. An anchor of the exhibition—and jewel of the Freybes' collection—this is the first time that this impressive work will be shown in a museum setting. The work will also serve as inspiration for programming at the Gallery which is being supported by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation on the occasion of the artist's 100th birthday.

As collectors, the Freybes are interested in materials and material transformation. Several artists in their collection explore the raw power of material, from Light and Space artists like **Helen Pashgian** and **Mary Corse**, to the Arte Povera practitioner **Giuseppe Penone** and the Korean avant-garde artist **Lee Ufan**. The transformation of everyday materials is encompassed by **Tara Donovan's** *Toothpicks* (2004), a free-standing minimalist cube assembled from hundreds of thousands of wooden toothpicks, and **Wolfgang Laib's** *Milkstone* (1992–95), a sculpture comprising a slab of pure white marble topped with a smooth, reflective surface of milk. Both artworks, which speak to the ephemerality of materials, will come to life for visitors at the Gallery.

South African artist **William Kentridge**, who is recognized for his expressive prints, drawings, and animated films, is represented with *Refugees (1. God's Opinion is Unknown; 2. Leaning on Air)* (2018–2021), a monumental collage of woodblock prints portraying a procession of migrants. There are also other works that relate to resonant topics in recent history, including **Christian Boltanski's** sculpture *Réliquaire* (1990), which evokes the memory of lives lost to the Holocaust.

In some instances, the Freybes collected specific artists in depth, acquiring works at different points throughout their career. Acclaimed British artist **Tacita Dean** is one such example, and the collection includes

significant works such as the 16mm film *Pie* (2003); the painting *Kippy Cloud* (2016); and a photographic series titled *LA Exuberance 1-15* (2016).

Postcards from the Heart: Selections from the Brigitte and Henning Freybe Collection runs from April 18 until October 5, 2025. The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated brochure that features an interview between Eva Respini and Brigitte and Henning Freybe. The brochure is available to purchase via the Gallery website or in the Gallery Store. The exhibition is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by **Eva Respini**, Deputy Director & Director of Curatorial Programs, with **Andrea Valentine-Lewis**, Curatorial Assistant.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/exhibitions/postcards-from-the-heart>

Rauschenberg 100 Partner:

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Image: Robert Rauschenberg, *Sea-Cow Treaty (Spread)*, 1977, cloth, silk, paper, transfer images, metal plates, metal taps, metal buckets (joined by single handle), electrical wiring, mounted on wood, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Promised Gift of Brigitte and Henning Freybe, © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/CARCC Ottawa, Photo: Vancouver Art Gallery

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's ground-breaking exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture. The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is situated on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and is respectful of the Indigenous stewards of the land it occupies, whose rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Vancouver and the work of the Gallery.